

**Anne Gjelsvik & Rikke Schubart:
*Women of Ice and Fire: Gender, Game of Thrones,
and Multiple Media Engagements.*
New York/London: Bloomsbury. 2016**

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The title is self-explanatory; this is an anthology about the cultural phenomenon based on the storyworld of George R.R. Martin's fantasy series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, which was later adapted into the HBO television series *Game of Thrones*, focusing on the portrayal of women. Thirteen authors and eleven essays are studying the women of *Game of Thrones* from different angles both in the original novel and in the video games. Their main focus is on the television series, however.

It is a progressive anthology – not so much because of its observations about feminism which have been heard many times before, but because it takes fantasy fiction seriously. This means that George R.R. Martin's work can now be discussed within academic circles. I would like to emphasize four articles: Felix Schröter's views on *GoT* video games because he focuses on game mechanics in relation to the fantasy world. Marta Eidsvåg's for comparing the television adaptation with the original work. Susana Tosca's and Lisbeth Klstrup's transmedial take on YouTube fan recaps. And Elizabeth Beaton's article, which takes a genuine interest in George R.R. Martin's ideas and thoughts on his fantasy world.

That said, the anthology is not without its problems. You could make an anthology about *Game of Thrones* or about women in fantasy fiction. But the theme "Women in Game of Thrones" is far too narrow. The anthology simply ends up with too much redundancy, explaining the same characters, the same problems and arguments over and over again. This is not all. For some reason, the majority of the authors have to create a caricature of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in order for them to tell the reader that this is

bad and therefore George R.R. Martin's work is good. It is a strange kind of straw man. First of all, whether or not Tolkien's work is good or bad does not change anything in Martin's work; and second, Martin's work could not have existed had it not been for J.R.R. Tolkien.

This leads to another more general problem with academia today. In the twentieth Century, modernists became scared of fantasy, science fiction and other types of fantastic fiction. They were afraid this would lead to escapism. Instead of confronting their fears, academia acted as if this type of fiction simply did not exist. Consequently, much fantastic literature, many films and other fantastic culture were left out of the cultural history. Now, and increasing number of academic scholars want to analyze fantastic fiction, but they do not know the cultural history behind fantastic fiction; what is even worse, they do not even know that they do not know this. Yes, they have heard of J.R.R. Tolkien, J.K. Rowling and some popular movies like *Buffy: The vampire slayer*. But that is about it. Academia lack the knowledge about this cultural history that most amateur scholars take for granted. This means that however embarrassing this is, amateur scholars are often better equipped to conduct these analyses than academic scholars. And it certainly does not help knowing a great deal about postfeminism and postmodern critics. The quest for a modern academic scholar delving into fan culture and fantastic fiction must therefore be to become familiar with the cultural history of fan culture and fantastic fiction so that the analyses can rise to a higher level.

Nevertheless, the articles are well written, although for many of them it is unclear what the purpose of the article really is. The reader is presented with female characters, and there are discussions of whether or not these characters are feminist or not. But the conclusions to all of this are vaporizing. Luckily, Rikke Schubart helped me understand this when she wrote: "Postfeminism relies on attitude rather than ideology." (p. 122). Then it dawned on me that this was not ideology critique; it was only an attitude that reminded me of analytical critique. There was not supposed to be a clear-cut conclusion. These articles were merely essays giving the impression that an analysis had taken place. With this in mind I could better appreciate the articles as academic rituals rather than academic knowledge producing works.

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